

Kootenai Tribe Sign Memorandum of Agreement to Develop Enhanced Tribal Card

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Boise, Idaho - Customs and Border Protection and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho signed today the first Memorandum of Agreement for the development of an Enhanced Tribal Card.

Upon successful development, testing and issuance, this document will be available to members of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho to establish their identity, tribal membership and United States or Canadian citizenship for the purposes of border crossing. The ETC is designed to be acceptable for entering the United States by land or sea under the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative.

On June 1, WHTI will be implemented at land and sea ports of entry, requiring travelers — including U.S. and Canadian citizens — to present an approved travel document to enter the United States. The approved documents include a passport, a Passport Card, a NEXUS, SENTRI or FAST trusted traveler program card and a state- or province-issued enhanced driver's license. Travelers under age 16, or anyone under age 19 traveling in a school or other official group, need to present only a birth certificate or alternative proof of citizenship.

“Enhancing the integrity of travel documents for all travelers is critical to improving both the security and efficiency of our borders,” said Acting CBP Commissioner Jayson Ahern. “Verifying citizenship and identity of those crossing our borders in a secure manner that also respects the relationship between the United States government and the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho is important to all of us, and I want to personally thank the Kootenai for their leadership in this historic partnership.”

The agreement was signed in a formal ceremony at CBP headquarters by Ahern and Jennifer Porter, Chairperson of the Kootenai Tribe of Idaho.

In spring 2007, CBP sent over 600 letters to all federally recognized tribal entities soliciting comments for the WHTI land and sea rulemaking process and received 42 comments, reflecting primarily those tribes within the northern and southern border regions. The Department of Homeland Security considered these comments as well as the following options for applying WHTI to the Tribes: making no accommodation and requiring Tribe members to obtain the same documents that are available to all other U.S. citizens; broader issuance of the American Indian Card currently issued to members of the federally recognized Kickapoo Tribes; accepting tribal enrollment cards from tribes whose members continue traditional border crossings; and accepting all tribal enrollment cards from all federally recognized tribes.

After considering the Tribes' comments and these options, DHS and the Department of State described in the WHTI land and sea final rule published on April 3, 2008 how DHS will work with interested federally recognized tribes to develop new, enhanced tribal cards that may be designated as WHTI-compliant documents.

On April 3, 2008, CBP sent a letter to all federally recognized tribal entities inviting them to work with CBP to enhance their tribal identification card and throughout the year, CBP met individually with numerous tribes to discuss specific concerns and details regarding the creation of an ETC.

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative is the joint DHS-DOS plan that implements a 9/11 Commission recommendation and Congressional mandate to establish document requirements for travelers entering the United States who were previously exempt, including citizens of the U.S., Canada and Bermuda. WHTI document requirements for air travel went into effect in January 2007. For more information, visit the WHTI Web site. (GetYouHome.gov)